



The INQUIRER

£1

www.inquirer.org.uk

the voice of British and Irish Unitarians and Free Christians Issue 7911 25 March 2017

PROCESSED

89 APR 05 2017

U LIBRARY

Utopia is
inside you

The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

Established 1842

The Inquirer is the oldest
Nonconformist religious newspaper

"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."

*From the Object passed at the
General Assembly of the Unitarian and
Free Christian Churches 2001*

The Inquirer is published fortnightly
by The Inquirer Publishing Company
(2004), Registered Charity 1101039.

Editor M Colleen Burns MA

46A Newmarket Road
Cringleford

Norwich NR4 6UF

ph: 01603 505281

e: inquirer@btinternet.com

Copyeditor Sarah Reynolds

Cover by postergen

Articles express the views of their
authors. Submissions are welcome
and may be edited for content and
length. They should be emailed or
typed and should be the author's
original work or be attributed
appropriately.

Subscribe Annual subscriptions are
£35 with discounts for bulk orders.

Cheques payable to 'The Inquirer'.

Write to James Barry

24 Lodge Lane

Keymer, Hassocks

West Sussex, BN6 8NA

ph: 01273 844940

e: admin@inquirer.org.uk

Advertise for £6 per column cm, on
3-col page, plus VAT or £7.50 per
col cm, on a 2-col page. A one-page
supplement is £200. One column on
a 2-col page is £100, on a 3-col page,
£75. A5 fliers may be inserted for
£95 plus VAT. Contact the editor for
details.

Births, marriages and deaths are
50p a word plus VAT.

Find out more about Unitarians

www.unitarian.org.uk

or email info@unitarian.org.uk

The General Assembly, Essex Hall

1-6 Essex Street

London WC2R 3HY

ph: 0207 2402384

Inquiring Words

Change Alone is Unchanging

Whosoever wishes to know about the world must learn
about it in its particular details.

Knowledge is not intelligence.

In searching for the truth be ready for the unexpected,

Change alone is unchanging.

The same road goes both up and down.

The beginning of a circle is also its end.

Not I, but the world says it: all is one.

And yet everything comes in season.

— Heraklitos of Ephesos

Message from the chair of the Inquirer board

An apology to our readers

In November of last year, we began to experience difficulties regarding the printing and distribution of *The Inquirer*. At least three editions arrived late, and there have been other problems. I have tried where possible to send out information, accompanied by apologies, for the delays, none of which were brought about by any of the *Inquirer* team. All deadlines have been met. In January, it became clear that the printers, Headley Brothers, were in serious difficulties so the decision was made to change to a different company. This has been achieved, and this issue of the paper is the second to have been produced for us by Belle Design and Print, Manchester, the same company that prints the *Unitarian* magazine.

We were reluctant to leave Headleys, the printer we have used for many generations, but we are confident that the new printers will give us good and reliable service.

The arrangements for the editing, administration and financing of the paper remain the same. We apologise again for the disruption and inconvenience caused to our readers and to those responsible for distributing the *Inquirer* in their congregations. Thanks go to the editor, company secretary, finance officer and administrator for coping with the changes and to you, our readers, for your patience. We hope you will continue to support *The Inquirer* and help us to grow its circulation.

— John Midgley

Correction

In the 11 March edition of *The Inquirer* an article titled 'Here's to civil and religious liberty,' misattributed the quote 'Ministry which enables ministry'. It was the Rev John Clifford who said it and, indeed, wrote a section on the idea for the 'Vision for the Future' booklet produced by the Unitarian General Assembly.

With thanks

The colour cover on this issue of *The Inquirer* was sponsored by the London District of Unitarians (LDPA) to celebrate a successful FUSE weekend. See FUSE photos on page 11.

Dystopia or utopia? Hard to tell



A publicity photo of Charlie Chaplin for his film 'Modern Times', which offered a dystopian view of the technological future. Photo via Wikimedia Commons

By Alan Ruston

Older readers will recall the TV panel game, 'Call My Bluff' which first appeared on radio as 'My Word?'. Three well-known personalities were each given an unknown word from the massive Oxford English Dictionary and in turn presented a different definition of the word in question. Only one definition was correct and other panellists had to guess which was the right one. This game was broadcast for years and the format has appeared under several guises. The numbers of unknown English words which arose was amazing, almost never ending.

The attraction of this game lies in our fascination with words and their meaning. When I encounter words unknown to me they are written down in a notebook to look up later and hopefully be added to my mental dictionary. One word that I encountered in an article on history was new to me – it was dystopia, then little used but this is no longer true. Its meaning is rather obvious, being the opposite of 'utopia' which of course denotes an imaginary place that is absolutely perfect; it was first coined in the 1550s by Sir Thomas More in a book of that name.

Prophets of doom and gloom

Dystopia is a way of thinking or an imaginary place or circumstance that is absolutely horrible. The word was first used by John Stuart Mill, the philosopher, when speaking in the House of Commons in March 1868 about prophets of doom and gloom (they had them then as we have them now). He said:

It is too complimentary to call them Utopians, they ought

rather to be called dys-topians. What is commonly called Utopian is something too good to be practicable; but what they appear to favour is too bad to be practicable.

Doomsayers as old as the Bible

However, dystopia or seeing everything turning out very badly, has a longer history going back long before 1868. Perhaps the first dystopian was the author of the Book of Revelation in Chapter 8 of the Bible. Here woe is piled on woe and centres on the day of judgment when the seventh seal is broken, storms of hail and fire mingled with blood run down upon mankind and angels fly to and fro shrieking, 'Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth.'

This text was not emphasised in medieval times as the church did not want anyone looking at key issues too deeply, especially by examining the text of the Bible; what would happen is given by God and should be left at that. But negativity returned by the end of the 18th century, in the work, for example, of the scholar Rev Thomas Malthus, who although being an Anglican, lectured at Manchester College then at York. Malthus argued that the number of people on the earth would constantly increase but food production would not match it. The result would be starvation and death, so bringing the numbers down again to an equilibrium. Miserable and seemingly defeatist yes, but an assertion which has never been entirely disproved.

HG Wells in the 20th century took up the theme in his visionary works *The Time Machine*, and *When the Sleeper*

(Continued on next page)

We Unitarians affirm positive beliefs

(Continued from previous page)

Awakes. His books were exciting but often bleak in their conclusions. Later came George Orwell and his book entitled *1984*, published in 1948. Here the state had taken over technology leading to the total control of the life and even the thinking of individuals. This key work envisaged a future where technological advances would make people into automatons and cyphers, a fear which has been enhanced in this age of computers and the internet. Charlie Chaplin satirised the impact on individuals of the march of technology in his film *Modern Times* of 1936 though his conclusions were more positive.



George Orwell

Being watched

By the second half of the 20th century dystopia was in full flood and utopia was out. Communism in Eastern Europe seemed to show that individuality was on the road to being crushed. Technology, rather than liberating us as the Victorians believed would happen, was perfecting surveillance systems that would spy on people in numerous ways. Some say that cameras on so many of our streets seem to be taking us along this path, and computer surveillance generally is creating a situation where people feel they are being watched all the time – to their detriment.

The evolution of doomsday scenarios during the Cold War era encouraged a belief in dystopia amongst many people. Where HG Wells predicted mass bombardment from the air, people in the 1960s realised that it only took the pressing of a button to start a nuclear war that would destroy cities, incinerate the inhabitants and poison the survivors. Dystopia was very much in the air during the Cuban missile crisis of 1963.

Disaster scenarios abound

In more recent times the number of scientifically verifiable disaster scenarios have increased at an alarming rate. There is climate change of course and all that goes with it – the melting of the ice caps and significant rises in temperature; black holes and meteorites crashing into the earth to destroy most of us; continental plates knocking together and creating havoc; over population; massive volcanic eruptions sending clouds of dust in the air that will slowly clog up our lungs and cut out the light, and of course global terrorism and its continuing implications. You can probably think of other credible examples that demonstrate ways in which life as we know it may fall apart.

Our responses are similar to those made in medieval times when doomsday itself seemed to have arrived during the massive impact of the Black Death in the 14th century. Perhaps their reaction can best be compared to our own in response to the ebola contagion and its potential spread around the world. Many films, such as *Terminator* are dystopian, as they anticipate a dreadful society, based on hatred and naked violence.

However, as religious liberals, we need to ask ourselves if these gloomy views are valid. Is a high permanent pessimism a healthy attitude to take? Or more importantly are we just making our flesh creep with interpretations of what might

happen? There are so many potential horrors presented to us today that they almost cancel each other out. We cannot worry about everything which might happen in the future, our minds and our vision is too finite.

Extremes should not dominate

Is a balanced view on all this dystopia possible? We may reject utopia but proclaiming dystopia is just as misplaced. Both are extremes that should not dominate our thinking and our living. If I was asked to choose between belief in utopia and dystopia, I'd choose the former. Believing in positive and uplifting possibilities, even if not realisable, is the best course. Perfection is never to be reached but it's more life affirming and uplifting than dwelling

on potential horrors that might arise in the future. Therefore, I say let's give three cheers for utopia, affirming a positive viewpoint which may be impossible to realise. I believe it's a more spiritually and generally uplifting viewpoint than dystopia which plays on our fascination and fear of what might happen in the future.

I'm not changing tack completely but I want to mention graffiti to illustrate my point. Most of the graffiti we see plastered over blank walls often using complex designs is meaningless, but some graffiti is different and can be thought provoking.

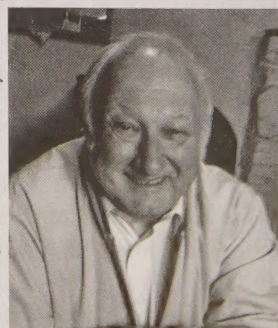
Philosophy in chalk

I once saw written on a wall in Cork, Eire, 'The Bank of Ireland makes road maps for the soul,' exemplifying Irish mournfulness. Nearer at hand are the walls of Balliol College Oxford which have had graffiti painted on them for centuries. Now it's done with chalk but as always it's much disproved of by the authorities. A few years ago I saw a short statement written there in white chalk – Utopia is inside you – which made me think. I believe this simple statement is profound in its implications though its opposite is also true. Utopia or dystopia can be inside you, these four words are worth thinking about. Unitarians affirm a belief in the individual and our positive perception of what the internal spiritual life can be. Any form of theology or belief (or the lack of it) will fit into the statement, 'Utopia is inside you,' is an outlook on life. It's not saying that the world is so bad that you have to retreat into a hopeless self, but rather that an internal vision can be created within that can mould how we see and interpret what is around us in everyday life.

Our outlook on the world, its meaning and interpretation is determined by the vision that is inside each of us. It could be said that affirming the possibility of utopia is ridiculous and unrelated to reality, but so is its opposite. The internal Kingdom of the Spirit, or of God if you like, can be envisioned and created inside each one of us.

Utopia is, or can be, inside you.

Alan Ruston is a Unitarian historian and a member of the Watford Fellowship.



EC moves forward with 'Next Steps'

Executive Committee Key Messages - 20 February 2017

1. General Assembly Roll of Ministers and Lay Pastors

The Recommendations of the Ministry Strategy Group and Interview Panel were approved and we are pleased to announce:

a) that the following were approved for Ministry training commencing September 2017:

- * Michael Allured - to be trained for the ministry based at Harris Manchester College, Oxford over 3 years
- * Melda Grantham - to be trained for the ministry based at Harris Manchester College, Oxford over 3 years.

b) that having successfully completed their probationary period; the Revs John Carter, Dr Maria Curtis, Jo James, Anna Jarvis, Matthew Smith and Kate Whyman have been added to the Roll of Ministers with Full Status.

2. Training and Education Development (TED) Project

An update report was received from Rachel Skelton, Project Manager. 'Ministry in all its forms' is a key element of 'From Vision to Action: Next Steps' with the aim of ensuring the provision of the best possible ministry for congregations. The objective of the TED project is to develop a modular framework for training, education and professional development that will be accessible to a larger number and variety of people than before. Some, but not all of these, may then go on to seek entry into professional Ministry. Since the last EC meeting, discussions have taken place on the development of a framework describing a Unitarian approach to learning and development for all. This has focused on learning pathways and an overall governance structure. A workshop will take place at the Annual Meetings.

3. Web Project

The objective of the web project is to develop a website as a one-stop landing page for Unitarians seeking information as well as to provide a resource for spiritual browsers and seekers on Unitarian perspectives. An initial workshop has taken place to develop and clarify the ideas behind the proposal into a brief prior to meeting the web development company who will be assisting the General Assembly in creating the site. A 'soft launch' will take place at the Annual Meetings.

4. Identity Project

The identity project forms part of 'Next Steps' and is intended to assist Unitarians create a clear message about who we are and what we believe. Following a tendering process and interviews, a Consultant has been appointed to provide professional support. The process will involve engagement with a number of key stakeholders from across the denomination and participation in a workshop at the Annual Meetings.

5. Executive Committee Membership

The Executive Committee agreed to initiate a process of co-option for the three vacancies that are the result of insufficient candidates being nominated to fill all the positions up for election. This will involve a skills audit of the new Executive Committee in order to identify gaps that could be filled by co-option. It is hoped to make a decision at the first meeting of the new EC in May with the new co-opted members attending their first meeting in July 2017. Look out for further information soon.

The Executive Committee spent some time considering

the issues underpinning the inability to attract sufficient candidates to fill all the vacant places on the EC. It was felt that this reflects the position at every level of the denomination; congregational, district and national. There is a clear need in this context to look closely at issues affecting Volunteering which has been identified as a priority in 'Next Steps'.

6. Ministry Strategy Group

Rev Daniel Costley was thanked for his service as Chair of the Ministry Strategy Group following his decision to stand down.

7. Annual Meetings

It was reported that arrangements are in hand for the 2017 Annual Meetings. As part of the agenda there will be short reports on what action has taken place as a result of three recent Resolutions.

8. European Unitarians Together (EUT) Ulm/Neu-Ulm, June 2-5, 2017

British Unitarians are encouraged to support the first pan-European meeting of Unitarians, Universalists, Free Religious and Humanists which will take place in Germany from 2-5 June 2017. The Executive Committee agreed to fund two bursaries for young adults to support attendance. Further information is available from the Chief Officer.

Sponsored Column

President visits Reading



Members of Reading fellowship were delighted to welcome a former founder member of the fellowship, the current Unitarian General Assembly President, Dorothy Hewerdine (centre with medallion), to lead our service on Sunday 15 January. Dorothy had led the worship at Godalming in the morning. She spoke about Ministry and ministry.

Members who welcomed her were Jeff and Sue Teagle, Peter and Sheila Godfrey, Gwenda and Torkill Fozzard, Gwendoline Wingate, Charles Roberts, Wendy Preston, Hester Casey and Sarah Benfield. Photo by Sue Teagle

Subscribe to The Inquirer
Stay informed
Keep the Unitarian
flame lit
www.inquirer.org.uk

Doris' Column touches a nerve at

In a recent column, our columnist Doris suggested that Unitarian congregations sell their buildings and gather in pubs instead. That prompted many responses – including this one from 'God-on-the-Wold'.

Dear Doris,

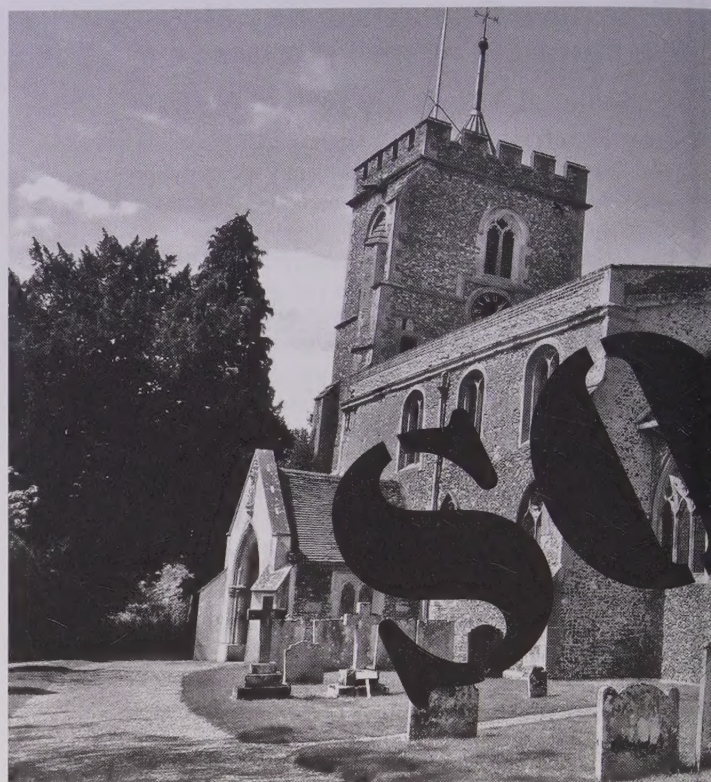
Let me introduce myself – the Reverend Gabe from the parish of God-on-the-Wold. Boy, did your article ('Put the churches on the market' *Inquirer*, 25 February) ruffle my feathers! You say you could spit at the Unitarian indifference you see all around you? Well, thank you for digging the knife in sufficiently, to stir me to respond. You see, over the years I've read your column – and laughed, or groaned, or cried – and thought I should write in to poor Doris to let her know all is not lost, to tell her to take heart and lower her blood pressure. But I never have, because here's the thing – I'm so busy (like many of my minister colleagues and lay folk) doing the very things you suggest, that there's never enough time to put pen to paper to tell you about them. But this time round, how could I *not* respond; I feel pastorally bound to put you out of your misery and soothe your troubled brow.

Because here's the thing Doris: I don't recognise the picture you paint – I really don't. Maybe I live in a bubble of privilege, but I don't know a single Unitarian church that opens for one hour a week on Sunday. All I can say to that is – 'I wish!' At God-on-the-Wold, our chapel and hall is used to full capacity throughout the week. You name it, we provide a space for it; U3A groups – teaching widowers to cook, sing rousing songs, write lovely poetry, or mug up on their medieval history; Body-Mind-Spirit groups – yoga, tai' chi, healing, gong baths (yes Doris – gong baths) and even dowsing! (Talking of dowsing, perhaps you could hire these folk out with their rods, to see if they can detect the faint pulse of life in the congregations that so concern you? My guess is their beating pulse is stronger than you think. They just need reviving with a little TLC.)

We're turning people away

And then there's the AA group, neighbourhood meetings, the children's parties – we can't fit 'em all in! I should know – my husband, 'the vicar's wife' as he calls himself, is the lucky chap who manages the lettings, and sometimes he has to turn folk away – *turn folk away* – because there's no room at the inn. Perhaps you could send me a list of all our churches which sit empty all week, and I'll point people in their direction. At God-on-the-Wold we're sitting on no pots of money, no legacies from Victorian worthies. Hiring out our premises helps keep us afloat, and it's a win-win situation, because our church has become a valuable community resource. In any given week, I'd say around 200 people come through our doors. Sell our buildings? Certainly not – where would they all go?!

You suggest we close our churches and sing hymns in pubs instead. Our weekly Ukulele club offers Uke Jams twice a month in the local pub, and if you can't play the ukulele we can



give you a tambourine (did I mention we allow ukuleles and tambourines at occasional Sunday services? Whatever next – we're almost charismatic!) I'm sorry your services garner so little feedback – that sounds disheartening – but perhaps the good folk listening, are so worn out from their valiant efforts trying to put into practice all you preach, that on Sundays they need a rest?

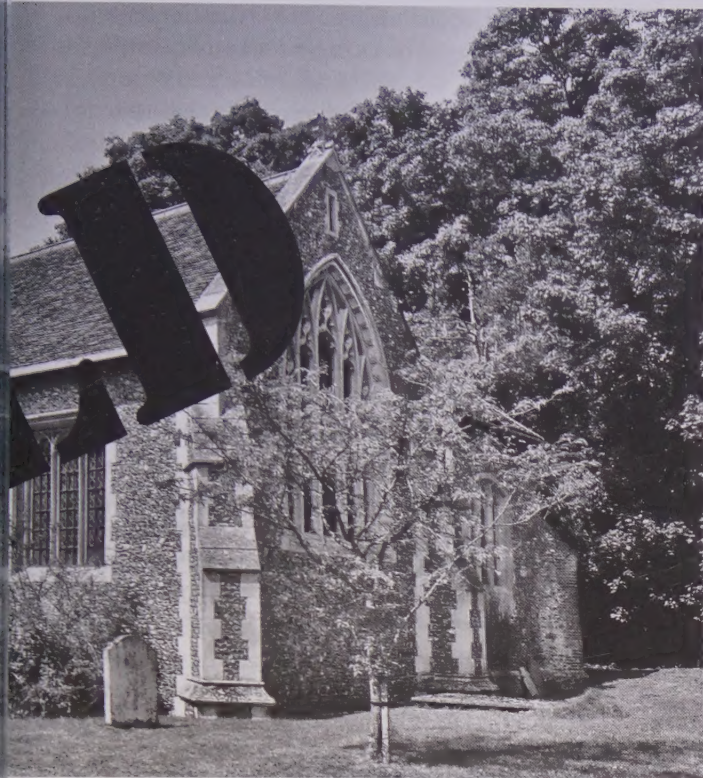
Come, and bring your oranges!

As to your juggling oranges, please can we hire you for our next All-Age Fairtrade service? Orange juggling would fit right in alongside our chocolate meditation – and we could put them in the fruit salad for our potluck lunch afterwards (just so long as they're fairly traded oranges.) Or maybe you'd like to stop by at a Café Church, and sit and talk to the good folk at God-on-the-Wold, whilst munching a croissant.

Dear Doris, I write with your best interests at heart – you sound as though you need some light relief. So how about coming to our monthly Community Art session and enjoying a nice cuppa and biscuit. Or you could throw some paint around to let off steam, or simply do some mindful colouring? If art's not your thing, what about dropping by for our weekly meditation – running for 8 years now. Few of our meditators end up as regular attenders at Sunday services, and no-one has yet been persuaded to become a trustee – but no matter – it's our way of offering something to the wider community without expecting anything in return.

If meditation isn't your thing, you'd be very welcome at our monthly prayer circle. Yes Doris – we pray. Not just Unitarians, but people from the community – the 'non-churched' – who haven't yet become so cynical that they dismiss prayer as a fool's game. A small group who find support in being together, lighting candles and offering joys, sorrows, thanks and intercessions into a silence rich with presence. (It helps by the way, that the pesky pews were taken out years ago – so we

busy chapel in God-on-the-Wold



can play with the chairs and put them in a welcoming circle.) When we next gather we'll say a prayer for you – and for every last Unitarian who is valiantly doing all they can to keep our beloved movement alive.

Who or what do we pray to in our little gathering? We'd all give different answers to that – but it's certainly not a straw God in a nighty. And you know what Doris, I think we all need to do more praying – *in community*. Perhaps that's the one thing we Unitarians haven't done *nearly* enough of. Alongside all the good actions and lovely growth ideas – to (metaphorically) get down on our knees and pray for guidance and courage and inspiration to see our way ahead, so we can keep our churches open for the benefit of the *whole* community.

There are many ways to give

As for selling our buildings so we can give the proceeds to charity – you make a fair point – but how about keeping our buildings *and* making them hubs for social action? We could do more on that front, but we've made a start. You'd be very welcome at our concert next week raising funds for refugees. Or come and spend a penny in one of our loos, each now twinned with a latrine in a developing country. Or visit us on Social Action Sunday – and join the children in making cards for prisoners of conscience, and packing gift boxes for families in need.

I don't want to boast – this isn't just about what goes on at God-on-the-Wold – but at all the Unitarian churches I visit. At the Chapel-on-the-Lake a few miles down the road, they are few in number, but draw in a crowd for their monthly folk concerts (a shame they kept the pews though – a bit numbing on the bum!) Oh, and just 2 days ago I sat in their lovely refurbished hall for a Progressive Christian Network meeting, where us Unitarians enjoyed heartfelt conversations with lovely liberal Christians (from whom we could learn a thing or too about progressive theology). A few miles further on, at the

'I think we all need to do more praying – *in community*. Perhaps that's the one thing we Unitarians haven't done *nearly* enough of. Alongside all the good actions and lovely growth ideas – to (metaphorically) get down on our knees and pray for guidance and courage and inspiration to see our way ahead, so we can keep our churches open for the benefit of the *whole* community.'

Church of the Hawthorn they host gatherings of ecologically minded folk via the Green Spirit network, and have a Pop-up Café. And did I mention my good friends at The Palace Garden Church – who they *don't* hire their premises to, and the events they *haven't* put on over the years, really aren't worth mentioning... And it's not just in this neck of the woods – I hear all sorts of good things happening in Unitarian churches up and down the country – people doing their best to walk their talk, passionate about their faith – but perhaps all too busy and worn-out to write in and tell you about it.

So here's the thing Doris; the churches you mention with two or three people sitting on nest eggs, grumbling about change and clinging onto their pews until they're carried out in their coffins – I've not met them – so I can't comment. But my guess is these churches are a smaller majority than you think. And I'm guessing if they really are as stubborn and dim-witted as you suggest, then they don't read your articles, because they don't read *The Inquirer*...so maybe, just maybe you're preaching to the converted?

Our movement may be dying, we face enormous challenges, but I still think we've punching above our weight – and some of us are doing more than rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. Yes, we need to heed the warning in Ant Howe's stirring article; (*Inquirer*, 14 January) yes, we need to link in with other denominations and faith groups, and not rely solely on pulling ourselves up by our overstretched bootstraps. But can I beg you in your next column, please offer a bit of carrot and a pat on the back, along with the stick? Because people need encouragement.

If you're ever down this way, we'd love to book you in for a visit – as long as we can find a space in the diary. And dear Doris – thank you for ruffling my feathers enough to make me give up several hours of my precious time to write And sorry it's taken me so long... did I tell you how busy I am doing all the things you suggest, and more?

In love and hope, The Reverend Gabe from God-on-the-Wold – somewhere down south.

As dictated to the Rev Sheena Gabriel of Godalming Unitarians.



Letters to the Editor (mostly for Doris)

Movement must look to successes

To the Editor:

Thanks to Ant Howe (*Inquirer*, 14 January) and Dorothy/Doris (*Inquirer*, 25 February) for continuing to provoke us to think about difficult facts.

When speaking to nonreligious people they say they have a spiritual life. This 'life' is to do with their meaning and purpose, with altruism, compassion and empathy.

This is their god. How do they nourish this? From their good relationships where the quality of love is high. Sometimes from creative activities, walking, dancing, music, meditation, etc.

If we don't want to die, as a movement, we need to look at good practice e.g. Bridport, ('Bridport grows by reaching out', *Inquirer*, 25 February) and use what we can.

Helen Parsons

Chalford, Stroud

Warwick chapel is a community focal point

To the Editor:

Dorothy what a load of rubbish! Well that's my view.

Our little chapel in Warwick, due to the foresight of previous worshippers, was converted from a room with a sloping floor and box pews, to a light, open, airy, multi-purpose room, which during March will be rented out for a total of 86 hours and which last year brought in £7560.

Our congregation will be there for probably eight hours over the four Sundays of March, and we will use the room once for carpet bowls on a Tuesday, welcoming friends from the Kingswood congregation.

So our chapel raises much-needed income, but it is far more than a milk cow for us, as every Friday a group of us call in for coffee and do the little jobs that are needed. Carole tidies the kitchen cupboards, Stuart will do a multitude of running repairs, the grass gets cut, and weeds pulled and it is this gathering which brings us together as much as any service on a Sunday.

What's more we take it in turns to take a lunch time service, lasting little more than 20 minutes, usually with a discussion afterwards.



Those who have never done anything like this in the past are becoming quite adept, and we have even had the odd visitor attend.

For me and for most of the congregation the chapel building is the focal point of our worship, a place where we feel most at home. Sell it and send the money to the Red Cross? Not on your life.

Cherry Dodd

Warwick Unitarian Chapel

Dorothy's best Corinthian yet!

To the Editor:

What a Corinthian column, Dorothy! Your best yet! ('Put the Churches on the Market!' *Inquirer*, 25 February) Voting Members of congregations are in significant decline and we urgently need a strategy to address that decline, not to spend endless hours looking at a strategy for growth. We are not a Buildings Preservation Trust and I don't think our forebears would have wanted this.

Can we keep the chalice aflame over the next few years in different ways? Here at Ullet Road Chapel, Liverpool, we have initiatives such as Book Clubs, the Liverpool Salon, Inter-denominational Coffee Mornings, etc. which keep Non-Conformity/Liberal Christianity alive in Merseyside – but it's almost like we have two constituencies. Those elderly Voting Members (who occasionally attend on a Sunday) and those more dynamic community members (who for whatever reason can't or don't want to attend on a Sunday).

The way forward must surely be

social media. Other Non-Conformists must be facing the same challenges. Does the Unitarian General Assembly communicate across the spectrum of like-minded liberal Christians/ UUAs for their thoughts about our decline?

Elizabeth Alley

Liverpool

Spare us becoming Swedenborgians!

To the Editor:

Dorothy Houghton, bless her, is delightfully asking for the moon, preferably with Venus and Mars in the basket as well. Sell all the churches we have and give to the poor? More likely, we'll mend the roofs and restore the windows until, like the Swedenborgians, we have £ millions in the bank and next to no members. The challenge is that the liberal agenda has been won. Britons don't need a Unitarian church for freedom, reason and tolerance: we can wifi the Internet in Costa. The winds of change no longer blow people into a 'featherbed for falling Christians'.

A faith group needs a clear spirituality. For what would God guide anyone to your congregation? The primary purpose of any faith gathering surely has to be its spiritual focus.

Unitarian Christianity – the how-to-live teachings of Jesus, free from the sacrifice-salvation theology of the 2nd-Century Church Fathers – has the merits of spiritual worth, internal coherence, and being different from what other churches offer.

A focus of meditation, free from the doctrines of Buddhism or any particular religion, has the same three advantages of spiritual value, coherence, and difference.

So too, perhaps, a nature-spirits reverencing, wheel-of-the-year celebrating Unitarian Paganism. A clear-focused spiritual offering, with effective and spiritually passionate leadership, may attract the Divine, and therefore people. But prayers to no one in particular, plus 'searching': apart from your ageing loyal five (or 15), who cares?

Wade Miller-Knight

Golders Green Unitarians

John Goodchild: historian, devoted Unitarian

John Goodchild (1935-2017)

John Goodchild, who died in January, was brought up as a Methodist, but discovered Unitarianism when he was seventeen and became a prominent member of the Wakefield Westgate congregation, which he served faithfully for over six decades, and which he described as 'the greatest influence for good' on his life.

He was at various times secretary or chair of the congregation, and he regularly led worship in the chapel and in Unitarian churches and chapels throughout the Yorkshire region and beyond.

He was always accompanied by a canine friend, and his dog, Benjy, was one of the chief mourners at his funeral, which was held at Westgate chapel on 31 January. The funeral service was attended by more than 300 people, testimony to the great respect in which he was held by the local community.

John was born in Normanton and educated at Wakefield Grammar School where he developed a keen interest in history, becoming a member of both the Wakefield Historical Society and the Yorkshire Archaeological Society in his mid-teens. On leaving school, he worked as a records clerk for the West Riding County Council, a job he resumed after completing his National Service in the Royal Artillery. He eventually became the Wakefield Metropolitan District's first archivist, a post which he held for some 20 years until his retirement in 1994.

A lifelong socialist, John was elected to the City Council, becoming Wakefield's youngest ever councillor. However, he found the work uncongenial, preferring to devote his time to historical research.

John was very well known as a local historian, giving (in his own words) 'thousands of lectures on thousands of subjects or aspects of subjects' and he regarded lecturing, researching, and collecting historical documents as his contribution to the betterment of society. He wrote and published around 200 books and essays, all based on original research. When he retired, he rented premises in Wakefield which he opened to the public as a local history study centre. It was used by some 2000 people each year and received visitors from all over the world. He bought books, manuscripts, maps and pictures and built up what appears to be without doubt the largest one-man-made local collection of the 20th Century, which he has bequeathed to the people of Wakefield. He saw himself as a regional Sir Thomas Phillips – a manuscript maniac – who was 'literally able to sniff out manuscripts'. In 1984 he was awarded an honorary Master's Degree by the Open University, 'for academic and scholarly distinction, and for public services'. He was a prominent member of the Unitarian Historical Society, a life-governor of UCM, and a former President of the YUU.

In 1966 John became a Freemason. He joined an historic lodge, No. 154, becoming its annual Master in 1971-72, and rising in the masonic hierarchy to become a Grand Officer – then the only one in Wakefield.

John summed up his own attitude to life as follows: 'He



John Goodchild, among his beloved manuscripts.

was grateful for love, for companionship, for beauty, for the smell of old books and manuscripts, for the delight of finding out in an historical context – indeed for life and its opportunities. He was a happy man, one who believed in innate goodness and the existence of God within oneself – and probably not elsewhere. He enjoyed life, and he believed that he was not afraid of death; he enjoyed excellent health, and was of a buoyant spirit, hopeful and loving.'

John leaves a partner, Alan, 'his soul-mate', to whom he 'gives his undying love and thanks.'

Written by Bill Darlison with much of the information taken from John's own written account of his life, which he instructed to be read at his funeral.

Obituary addendum from Ernest Baker, Westgate Chapel, Wakefield minister, 1974-81

I met John when coming to be minister of the then so-called "West Yorkshire Group" of 4 congregations, my first ministerial charge, and I always thought of him as a typical, idiosyncratic particular kind of Unitarian: to some old-fashioned, to some unbending in firmly-held views. He was utterly committed to Westgate Chapel, and the dissenting tradition of its witness. I quickly learned to respect his historical knowledge, especially of local history. He was without doubt a character, and 'one of a kind'.

John was a faithful attender at worship, mostly with a canine companion, and supportive of my ministry. If he disagreed with me, he would suggest a question reflecting his alternative perspective with politeness, and let aside my sometimes inability to respond adequately to his comment!

I vividly recall the occasion we went through the small, long-ignored remains of the Nonconformist Library in the old Schoolroom, part of the Parsonage where we lived, at Lydgate Chapel in New Mill, which was also part of my charge.

And he set his friend, the late Kate Taylor, to interview me on the phone for an article in the *Wakefield Express*, which helped begin her active involvement with Unitarianism. My wife Marion and I were subsequently to spend a week on a canal boat with them both – and it snowed!

I think it is typical of John, that he wished for his funeral service, a reading from the Rev Will Hayes' originally 1920s attempt at a universalistic, that is pan-faith, Liturgy, 'Every Nation Kneeling', a title taken from a verse of the Qur'an.

Is your Congregation well managed?

By Sandy Ellis

Every organisation needs a clear set of rules which set out the procedures for managing its affairs in a clear and efficient manner. For Charities this is known as a 'Governing Document'.

This may be a 19th-century Trust Deed inscribed on goatskin, a Charity Commission 'Scheme' or a modern Constitution. And let's be quite clear about this: Those who manage the affairs of a Charity whether they call themselves 'The Management Committee', 'The Church Committee' or whatever, legally, they are the Managing Trustees of the Charity. The problem with a Trust Deed or a Charity Commission Scheme, is that it is often designed for a different purpose and rarely deals with the day to day problems of running a Congregation. One Trust Deed I came across devoted most of its content to defining the clearance height to be left for the barges using the canal over which the Church was built but said nothing about membership, meetings or investments! Whilst another Charity Commission Scheme gave Trustees contemplating closure, no power to realise the assets or guidance about how to dispose of them.

Avoid misunderstandings

There's another aspect to consider and that is the responsibilities of the Trustees under the Charities Acts. It is now a legal requirement that the Trustees attach an Annual Report to the Annual Accounts, referring to the Governing Document and stating what action they have taken regarding a prescribed list of matters. But Trustees must always act within their powers in achieving the Charitable Object and when a Congregation has a modern Constitution these are defined, so it avoids misunderstandings and makes administration much simpler by defining the procedures to be followed about such matters as:

- 1) The Official Name of the Congregation
- 2) The Object of the Charity
- 3) Who may be a member and how misbehaving members may be expelled.
- 4) When the Financial Year starts and ends.
- 5) The Procedures to be followed at Meetings such as the amount of notice required, who is entitled to vote and how voting takes place.
- 6) How the Chairman, Secretary & Treasurer are elected and how long they may serve before being re-elected.
- 7) How many other Managing trustees there shall be, how they are elected and how long they may serve before being re-elected. Thus you never again have to pay a Solicitor to produce a 'Deed of Appointment of Trustees' because they are legally elected at each Annual General Meeting.
- 8) The identity of the Custodian Trustee – necessary because unincorporated Managing Trustees are not allowed to hold buildings in their own name.
- 9) The Powers delegated to the Managing Trustees including the purchase and sale of property and investments and to allow those investments to be held in the name of an approved Stockbroker, making dealing much simpler.
- 10) The appointment of an Independent Examiner or Auditor

11) Which rules may be altered without prior permission of the Charity Commission.

12) A winding up provision defining the procedures to be followed and how the assets may be disposed of. This may save later Trustees much heartache.

13) A set of Bye Laws governing the operation of the Congregation Committee, including how often they must meet, the quorum and the duties of the Secretary.

Happy to help other congregations

The Midland Unitarian Association started this process many years ago by negotiating the model Constitution with the Charity Commission in the 1990s. Today, of the 17 congregations, 12 are registered charities in their own right (10 using the model constitution and two with Charity Commission schemes). Three have adopted the model constitution and are ready to register and one is in the process of adopting it.

For those Congregations wishing to pursue this further, I would be happy to email a copy of the model constitution with notes on how it may be tailored to their particular needs. Also some Guidance Notes on how to then use it to apply for Registered Charity status. Write to: sandyellis1932@gmail.com

Sandy Ellis is a member of Oat Street Chapel, Evesham.

Unitarians in Edinburgh seek a new minister

Our vibrant community at St. Mark's seek a new full-time minister on the GA roll or minister with probationary status. The successful candidate will be able to combine the spiritual, intellectual and pastoral and be in tune with our community's ethos.

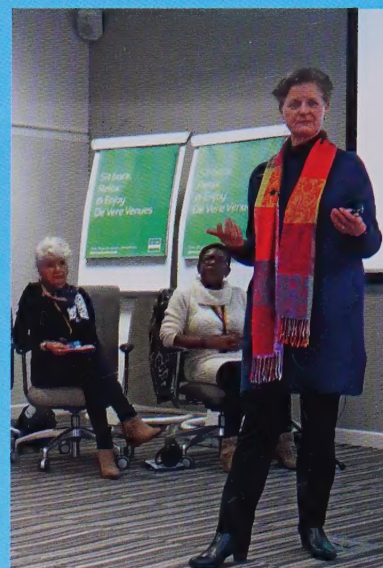
We offer GA-approved stipend plus additional trust funding, manse allowance and expenses package. St Mark's is situated in the heart of the capital's world heritage site in the city's west end and within Edinburgh's cultural area.

Closing date for applications 31st May 2017
Start date negotiable

edinburgh-unitarians.org.uk

For information pack please contact:
Roger Hartley –
email: roger.m.hartley@gmail.com

St Mark's Unitarian Church
7 Castle Terrace
Edinburgh
EH1 2DP



Early 100 Unitarians from congregations in London and the South East as well as from half a dozen other Districts came together for this year's FUSE event (Festival of Unitarians in London and the South East) at the De Vere Horsley Estate in Surrey. FUSE began five years ago and has been a great example of what Districts can do.

A combination of things drew people; a full programme of workshops, the opportunity for retreat, rest and relaxation all in a new venue with modern accommodation and leisure facilities, alongside an enchanting Victorian mansion.

The Rev Tina Geels, Remonstrant Minister and theologian from the Netherlands was the stimulating keynote speaker. Her pre-conference workshop 'Who are we and where are we going' (photo upper right), focused on the book she has written with the Rev Dr Hans le Grand – *It's all about your search for truth and meaning, not about our belief system*. In her second workshop, which was interactive, the theme was liberal practice for the future. Those who attended the workshops were challenged to revitalise our religious liberalism by making our faith visible in daily living and not just our rational thinking. (Copies of the book are available from the LDPA.)

Seven other high quality workshops led largely by members of LDPA congregations included circling, dancing, Singing, Instrumental music, Prayer, Silence, Listening with the heart, the Spirit of Nature (photo, lower right). There were devotional, meditative and yoga sessions in the morning.

But it wasn't all work! The spring-like weather encouraged people to enjoy the grounds and the indoor swimming pool was popular. There was a party atmosphere at a banquet meal in baronial style. Young people had their own secret space and a programme organised by GA co-ordinator John Worley and Liz Hills. They brought Greek mythology to closing session with the story of Icarus.

Our guests were the national President Dot Hewline and her husband John. Dot shared some of her impressions of the Unitarian national scene, saying 'hope' is an indicator of her experience.

FUSE began and ended with celebrations led by the Rev Kate Dean; inspiring worship, great singing and a band formed just for FUSE all added to a great Unitarian experience.

Feedback has been extremely positive and next year's FUSE has been booked at the same venue, 16-18 February 2018. You'd be welcome!

Martin Whitell, LDPA minister. Photos by John Worline

FUSE 2017



Finding the spirituality in Hip-Hop

Michael Hussey, a student at Middlesex University, led the Evening Gathering at Rosslyn Hill Chapel in Hampstead, as the congregation put down their hymnbooks and considered the spiritual elements of Hip-Hop music.

By Margaret Perry and Michael Hussey

From its beginnings in poverty-stricken areas, in the early 70's in the South Bronx, New York, Michael pointed out that this creative art form allowed for positive creative expression away from violence and street aggression.

The artist beginning this form of creativity was named Clive Campbell, better known as DJ Kool Herc. Arising from his role as a DJ he began using two turntables to line up the 'breakdown' section of popular funk songs. This allowed these sections, which were the best for dancing, to be played indefinitely. He began ad-libbing over these stripped-down beats, eventually making them rhyme. Hip-hop is widely thought to have been 'born' on 11 August 1973 at a party hosted by Kool Herc at 1520 Sedgwick Avenue. That address is now formally recognised as the birthplace of hip-hop by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. While today the term hip-hop is synonymous with a music genre, in its inception it was a multifaceted culture. The four basic 'elements' of hip-hop were MCing (rapping), DJing, B-boying (breakdancing) and graffiti. They were four different ways for the youth to express their creativity.

In the mid 1970s a man by the name of Afrika Bambaata reformed his street gang, known as the Black Spades. They abandoned their turf wars and crime, and decided to change. They rebranded themselves as the 'Zulu Nation' and made it their mission to promote positivity and creativity in the youth using hip-hop. They hosted many events for local youth, and are largely responsible for solidifying the elements of hip-hop. This created a cohesive culture that everyone from the community could be a part of in some way. It was a way for the youth to channel their energy into something positive and uplifting. While Bambaata has fallen from grace and the Zulu Nation no longer holds the place of prominence it once did, its contribution to the formative years of hip-hop is undeniable.

As the musical genre of hip-hop grew in popularity, it gave the artists a platform. People who felt disenfranchised and voiceless were now being heard, and now had an opportunity to genuinely influence their community for the better. That mindset gave rise to the Afrocentrism movement within hip-hop, whose goal was positively influencing the youth through music. If popular, 'cool', famous rappers were talking about positive things, perhaps it could have a real impact.

The Rev Kate Dean opened the evening with words by hip-hop artist Wale. 'A life without dreaming is a life without meaning'. We listened to the first song Michael had chosen. This was called 'Changes' by the artist Tupac Shakur. Michael explained about the techniques – poetic and musical, involved in composing (creating) rap.

Later we read the words as we listened to the artist Kendrick



Michael Hussey (seated) with his grandmother Margaret Perry (left) and the Rev Kate Dean following a hip-hop service at Rosslyn Hill Unitarians. Photo by Stewart Dean

Lamar narrating the story of his own development from indifference to compassion, when he felt challenged by a meeting with a beggar, paralleling the story in Exodus of a chance meeting with God. 'How Much a Dollar Cost?' was named as Barack Obama's song of 2015. The song places Kendrick in a hypothetical situation with this beggar, who is asking him for a single dollar. He refuses, claiming the man only wants the money for drugs. He claims he would've given him money when he was poorer but as a rich man he will keep everything he has earned for himself, down to the last penny. This exemplifies the potential corrupting influence that money and greed can have on a person. The beggar reveals himself as God, and Kendrick has failed the test of compassion. He then repents, asking for forgiveness. The song pushes the point that the concept of a dollar, and of sharing it with someone, is worth more than the actual monetary value of the currency. (You can try this yourself by finding the lyrics at: <http://bit.ly/2e8ZTSx> and then read them whilst listening to the song at: <https://vimeo.com/176432245>.)

We then listened to the song 'Don't Cry' by J Dilla. The song was created by sampling another song, i.e. taking elements of that song and using them almost as instruments to create an entirely new song. This was one of the cornerstones on which hip-hop was built, as early hip-hop artists did not always have access to musicians and expensive recording equipment.

Finally, we listened to 'Sunday Candy', a song by Chance the Rapper about paying his grandmother a visit at church.

The Rev Kate read Tupac's words to close the evening, after lively discussion where we further considered with Michael the subtleties of rhyme, the intricate internal schemes ('The cat ate rice and felt nice on the mat', for e.g. said Michael, off the cuff). We learnt about the huge mine of interesting, inspiring art from those who had felt powerless and dispossessed.

Margaret Perry and Michael Hussey are members of Rosslyn Hill Unitarian Chapel, Hampstead.